

Thinking With The Church: Essays in Historical Theology

By B.A. Gerrish

Reviewed by Jim West

People have a tendency to skip the Introduction of scholarly books. But oftentimes those very sections contain some of the best stuff the book has to offer. Such is the case with Gerrish's introduction, for in it he outlines the entire structure of the book. And he also makes a number of observations that are gems worth finding.

For instance, he remarks

... the unprecedented encounter of Christians with 'other religions' in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has made pluralism in religion one of the most urgent issues for present day theology (p. xvi).

So very true, which is why this present contribution is so welcome. Further, if readers skip this introduction, they'll miss this --

Calvin ... developed his comparison of God's Word to the provision of spectacles for the elderly or visually impaired: revelation is divinely improved vision, not the supernatural communication of truths about God that are inaccessible to reason (p. xvii).

Or as it stands in the standard edition of Calvin's Institutes (1.6.1)

For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly.

Gerrish doesn't note his citation from Calvin, though (which is also found at the commencement of Chapter Two). Had he, I wouldn't have needed to track it down.

Our author concludes his Introduction with this intriguing remark-

The question for our 'thinking with the church' is whether post-Reformation Protestantism, in surrendering predestination, has preserved the confession of God's sovereign grace (p. xxvi).

Now that's a question worth pondering. In future installments we will think with Gerrish as he thinks with the Church about this, and other very pressing, questions.